

Values vs. Secondary Qualities*

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RESUMEN

McDowell, respondiendo al argumento a partir de la “rareza” (*argument from queerness*) de Mackie, defendió el realismo sobre los valores por analogía con las cualidades secundarias. Se pondrá de relieve una tensión entre dos interpretaciones posibles de la respuesta de McDowell. De acuerdo con la primera, el realismo sobre los valores se vindicaría, efectivamente, pero a costa de no proporcionar una respuesta apropiada al argumento de Mackie. La segunda interpretación, sin embargo, proporciona una respuesta adecuada a dicho argumento, pero haciendo peligrar el realismo evaluativo.

ABSTRACT

McDowell, responding to Mackie’s argument from queerness, defended realism about values by analogy to secondary qualities. A certain tension between two interpretations of McDowell’s response is highlighted. According to one, realism about values would indeed be vindicated, but at the cost of failing to provide an appropriate response to Mackie’s argument; whereas according to the other, McDowell does provide an adequate response, but evaluative realism is jeopardized.

John Mackie developed a famous argument “from queerness” against there actually being objective values, where

an objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not because of any contingent fact that this person, or every person, is so constituted that he desires this end, but just because the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it [Mackie (1977), p. 40].

In his no less famous response to Mackie, John McDowell urged that not primary qualities, as Mackie supposed, but *secondary* qualities could provide a suitable model for real evaluative properties:

[I]t seems impossible — at least on reflection — to take seriously the idea of something that is like a primary quality in being simply *there*, independently of human sensibility, but is nevertheless intrinsically (not conditionally on contingencies about human sensibility) such as to elicit some “attitude” or state of will from someone who becomes aware of it [McDowell (1985), p. 132].

Shifting to a secondary-quality analogy renders irrelevant any worry about how something that is brutally *there* could nevertheless stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibilities. Values are not brutally there — not there independently of our sensibility — any more than colours are: though, as with colours, this does not prevent us from supposing that they are there independently of any particular apparent experience of them [McDowell (1985), p. 146].

My aim in this paper is to highlight a certain tension between two interpretations of McDowell's response. According to one interpretation, realism about values would indeed be vindicated, but at the cost of failing to provide an appropriate response to Mackie's argument from queerness. According to the other, McDowell would provide an adequate response, but evaluative realism would be jeopardized.

Mark Johnston (1989) introduced the notion of response-dependence with the aim of articulating an "analogist" defense of realism about values such as McDowell's: to the extent to which secondary qualities can be regarded as perhaps less than fully objective but genuinely *real* properties, so can evaluative properties. The notion of response-dependence has generated considerable literature during the last decade. Some philosophers have argued that the notion of a response-dependent *concept* over-generalizes, by also covering concepts for primary qualities, and hence fails with respect to the project for which it was introduced. Others have argued that precisely for this reason, the original characterization should be modified. They propose an account of a response-dependent *property* as one which *essentially* involves the disposition to elicit certain mental responses (in certain subjects under certain conditions).

Given the notion of a response-dependent property, a distinction may be drawn between, on the one hand, those which essentially involve the disposition to elicit certain mental responses in certain subjects *as they actually are* under certain conditions *as they actually are*, and on the other, those which essentially involve the disposition to elicit certain mental responses in certain subjects *whatever they are like* under certain conditions *whatever they are like*. I will call them *rigid vs. flexible* response-dependent properties. This distinction will be crucial for my claim about the two contrasting and conflicting interpretations of McDowell's response. I shall argue that according to one, values and secondary qualities are *rigid* response-dependent properties, whereas according to the other, they are both *flexible* response-dependent properties.

This paper is in four sections. In section I, I briefly present the notion of a response-dependent property, and the distinction between rigid vs. flexible response-dependent properties. In section II, I present the two interpretations of McDowell's response, which exemplify this distinction. In section III, I

present Mackie's argument from queerness and argue that although the view of values as rigid response-dependent properties does qualify as a realist proposal, it fails to respond to the argument. In section IV, the final section, I argue that the view of values as flexible response-dependent properties does not face the queerness problem, but has relativist consequences that vindicate a non-realist position about the evaluative.

I. RESPONSE-DEPENDENT PROPERTIES: RIGID VS. FLEXIBLE

In his "Dispositional Theories of Value" (1989), Johnston attributes to McDowell an "analogist" response against anti-realist arguments, whose "leading idea ... has been to show that by the same standards of genuineness it would follow that colour is not a genuine feature of surfaces" [Johnston (1989), p. 139], and introduced the notion of response-dependence as a means of stating the relevant analogy:

The most plausible, if highly generalizing, way of taking the analogy is this: evaluational concepts, like secondary quality concepts as understood by the analogists, are "response-dependent" concepts [Johnston (1989), p. 144].

Since then response-dependence has usually been characterized by means of conditions on certain biconditionals.

Let us say a response-dependence biconditional (rd *biconditional* for short) for a (predicate signifying a certain) property **F** is a substantial biconditional of the form

x is f iff x has the disposition to produce in subjects S the mental response R under conditions C ;

or the form

x is f iff subjects S have the disposition to issue the x -directed mental response R under conditions C ,

where "is f " signifies **F**, and "substantial" is there to avoid "whatever-it-takes" specifications of either S , R or C . (One such "whatever-it-takes" specification of, say, subjects S would be "those subjects, whatever they are like, such that something is disposed to produce in them responses R under conditions C iff it is F ." *Mutatis mutandis* for the responses and the conditions.)

Johnston's own characterization of a response-dependent *concept* required only that there was one such biconditional (for a predicate expressing

it) holding *a priori*. As I mentioned, some philosophers, including Frank Jackson and Phillip Pettit (2002), have argued that this original characterization over-generalizes, by also covering concepts for *primary* qualities. Very briefly, the key element in the arguments is this: regardless of the primary vs. secondary nature of the signified property, there will be descriptive material associated with the predicate, playing at least a reference-fixing-role which, in the cases at hand, will easily involve the relevant responses. Statements of them can be cashed in the form of rd biconditionals, which for familiar Kripkean reasons will hold *a priori*. Furthermore, given the possibility of rigidifying on the relevant subjects and conditions, the notion would over-generalize in the same way if one further requires that the rd biconditionals hold *necessarily* as well as *a priori*.

Some philosophers, including Manuel García-Carpintero (2002) and Ralph Wedgwood (1998),¹ have argued that precisely for this reason, the original characterization of “response-dependent” should be modified. Dwelling on the ideas of Kit Fine on essence (1994), they have independently proposed an account of a response-dependent *property* as one which *essentially* involves the disposition to elicit certain mental responses (in certain subjects under certain conditions). That Socrates belongs to singleton Socrates holds necessarily, but not in virtue of the nature of Socrates (but, presumably, of the set). That Plato is distinct from Aristotle again holds necessarily, but not in virtue of the nature of Plato (but, presumably of both Plato and Aristotle). Similarly, in the case of primary, fully objective, properties, the (perhaps rigidified) rd biconditionals might hold necessarily, but not in virtue of the nature of the properties. And when they *do* hold in virtue of the nature of the property, the property *is* response-dependent, as in the case of secondary qualities. In other words:

(RD) A property **F** is response-dependent iff there is an rd biconditional for (a predicate signifying) it which holds *a priori* and in virtue of the nature of **F**.

rd biconditionals, as characterized so far, may contain rigidifying devices. Let us say that a specification of the subjects in an rd biconditional is *rigid* iff the relevant predicate involved in the specification is rigid, and *flexible* otherwise. So take for instance “human who fails no discrimination test passed by other human subjects.” This is not, as it stands, a rigid specification. For take the relevant predicate “is a human who fails no discrimination test passed by other human subjects” and suppose that in the actual world, it is true (even if knowable only *a posteriori*) that being a human who fails no discrimination test passed by other human subjects is being a human with a perceptual apparatus meeting condition A. Now consider a counterfactual situation in which, due to whatever reason you might think of, humans who

fail no discrimination test passed by other human subjects are those with a perceptual apparatus meeting the different condition B. Now intuitively, it is this other property of being a human with a perceptual apparatus meeting condition B which would be relevant for evaluating sentences containing “is a human who fails no discrimination test passed by other human subjects” with respect to this other world. But then “is a human who fails no discrimination test passed by other human subjects” is not a rigid predicate. Its relevant rigidification, which can be put as something like “is a human who fail no discrimination test passed by other human subjects, as they actually are” leads, nonetheless, to a rigid specification of the subjects, of the sort of “humans who fail no discrimination test passed by other human subjects, as they actually are.”² An rd biconditional is *rigid* iff it involves a rigid specification of the subjects, and it is *flexible* otherwise. Now we can draw the distinction that will be crucial in what follows:

A response-dependent property is *rigid* iff the rd biconditionals for it holding in virtue of its nature are rigid.

A response-dependent property is *flexible* iff there is a flexible rd biconditional for it holding in virtue of its nature.

Any response-dependent property is rigid or flexible but not both. Rigid response-dependent properties are dispositions to produce in certain (rigidly specified) subjects certain responses under certain (rigidly specified) conditions; flexible response-dependent properties, by contrast, are properties whose extensions, in each possible world w , are those things which have in w the disposition to produce in certain subjects, as specified with respect to w , the relevant response under certain conditions, as specified with respect to w .

Suppose that “is f ” signifies³ a response-dependent property F , with response R , and suppose that S and C are relevant flexible specifications of subjects and conditions, and $S_{@}$ and $C_{@}$ their relevant rigidifications, and that the only relevant rd biconditionals are

(R) x is f iff x is disposed to produce in $S_{@}$ the response R under conditions $C_{@}$.

(F) x is f iff x is disposed to produce in S the response R under conditions C .

Both are, we may suppose, true with respect to the actual world and, we may also suppose, knowable *a priori*. But the following asymmetry arises: (abstracting now from issues about essence vs. necessity) their metaphysical status co-varies with the nature of F as stated in

F is a rigid response-dependent property iff (R) is necessary (i.e., iff (F) is contingent);

F is a flexible response-dependent property iff (F) is necessary (i.e., iff (R) is contingent).

This provides a way of testing whether “is F” signifies a rigid or a flexible response-dependent property, and based just on *a priori* considerations. The recipe, very abstractly put, is this: consider what could be a counterexample of the necessity of the relevant statement on the assumption that the predicate signifies one particular kind of property, neutrally described. I will refer to them as *target situations*. Then check how these should be intuitively described, with respect to the relevant predicate, and conclude accordingly.⁴

II. TWO INTERPRETATIONS OF MCDOWELL’S RESPONSE

As we are about to see, McDowell’s views concerning values and secondary qualities in his response to Mackie can be stated as asserting their response-dependence, in the general sense characterized by (RD). Thus there are two interpretations of his response, corresponding to the rigid and the flexible variety of response-dependence. The discussion of the difference between them in the subsequent sections will, I hope, also vindicate the relevance of the distinction.

According to McDowell,

a secondary quality is a property the ascription of which to an object is not adequately understood except as true, if it is true, in virtue of the object’s disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance: specifically, an appearance characterizable by using a word for the property itself to say how the object perceptually appears. Thus an object’s being red is understood as something that obtains in virtue of the object’s being such as (in certain circumstances) to look, precisely, red [McDowell (1985), p. 133].

This is to assert that secondary qualities are response-dependent properties in our general sense of (RD), provided that being a property the ascription of which to an object is not adequately understood except as true, if it is true, in virtue of the object’s disposition to respond in a certain way amounts to being a property such that it is in virtue of its nature that objects to which it is (truly) ascribed do have the disposition to respond in a certain way.

I think that the crucial further claims that McDowell makes in his response confirm this attribution, and stating them also helps to illustrate the general notion of a response-dependent property further. In my own words: if “is red” signifies a response-dependent property, being red, then commonsensical predications of it, of the sort “this rock is red,” are: (i) evaluable as true or false (for the most part); (ii) some of them indeed true; (iii) some of them indeed knowably true. Furthermore: (iv) being red is subjective in the sense that it depends on the responses as entailed by its response-dependence; but (v) being red is not subjective in the sense of making all occurrences of the responses automatically correct.

(i)-(v) hold provided that being red is response-dependent, regardless of whether it is a rigid or a flexible response-dependent property. Let us label the view according to which secondary qualities and values are rigid response-dependent properties *dispositionalism*, and the view according to which they are flexible response-dependent properties *flexibilism*.

I can now reformulate my main aim in this paper as that of highlighting a tension between the dispositionalist and the flexibilist interpretation of McDowell’s response to Mackie’s argument from queerness, to which now I turn.

III. THE RIGID CASE: THE PROBLEM WITH THE PRACTICALITY OF THE EVALUATIVE

As I understand it, Mackie’s argument from queerness aims to establish an incompatibility between values being real properties and what is sometimes called the “practicality of the evaluative,” that values, whatever they are, are “internally” connected to motivation, i.e. have “to-be-pursuedness” somehow built into them:

An objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not because of any contingent fact that this person, or every person, is so constituted that he desires this end, but just because the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it [Mackie (1977), p. 40].

I propose to state this *internalist* claim about values thus:

(I) It is necessary and *a priori* that: If something is good, then we would desire it (under appropriate reflective conditions, weakness of will and the like aside).

Several remarks are in order. First, this is an internalist claim *about values* themselves, and not an internalist claim about, say, evaluative judgments,

judgments to the effect that certain things are good or not, *evaluations* for short, to which people sometimes also refer with the same label. The connection between the two internalisms is, at best, complex, partly because the second is indeed a family of quite different claims. In any case, Mackie is clearly concerned with the “action-guiding” character that values themselves should have, which according to him would make them “queer,” if they were real. Second, it might be argued that the necessary (and *a priori* knowable) character of the connection falls short of capturing what was behind the traditional idea of values and motivation being “*internally*” connected, perhaps the notion of *essence* should be invoked here instead. This might be right, but it does not affect the present discussion, as the necessity of a statement is at least clearly a *consequence* of its holding in virtue of the nature of some entity. Third, strong as the connection between values and motivation is held to be, it can not be absolute, as the frequent cases of weakness of will, to name just one of the most famous ones, illustrate. This is what justifies a parenthetical clause like that in (I), obviously being taken with a pinch of salt. I do not mean to suggest that there might not be important difficulties in the vicinity, in so far as a sensible and satisfactory explicit formulation of internalism about values is concerned (see, among others, Johnson (1999) and subsequent discussion). Fortunately, a specification at the level of elaboration already provided will suffice, I think, for the considerations to come. Fourth, last but not least, I am interpreting Mackie’s “to-be-pursuedness” as requiring that values would *be* desired (under certain conditions), and not (merely) that they should be, or that desiring them would be appropriate. I think this is indeed a fair interpretation:

The need for an argument of this sort [the argument from queerness — DLdS] can be brought out by reflection on Hume’s argument that “reason” ... can never be an “influencing motive of the will” [Mackie (1977), p. 40].

(According to some, in my view plausible but controversial, views on the issue, the “prescriptive” claims would follow, at least in some central cases, from the corresponding “descriptive” ones.)

If the reality of values were modeled by fully objective primary qualities, then internalist claims of the (I) sort would clearly be false. What is crucial for me here is to argue that, for essentially the same kind of reason, claims like (I) would still be false even if the reality of values were modeled by the, in some sense subjective, *secondary* qualities, *if they are understood as rigid response-dependent properties*.

For the sake of vividness, let me focus on one particular, somehow Lewisian,⁵ dispositional proposal about values. According to this view, the following holds *a priori* and in virtue of the nature of goodness:

(L_@) x is good iff we, *as we actually are*, are disposed to value x under appropriately reflective conditions;

where *valuing* is the favorable attitude of desiring to desire, “appropriately reflective conditions” are spelled out as those of the fullest possible imaginative acquaintance, and “we” refers to a population consisting of the speaker and those relevantly like him. (We can assume that to be *relevantly* like a given subject is to be disposed, with respect to valuing *the relevant thing in question* in the relevant conditions, *exactly* how the subject is disposed.) Thus understood “we” turns out to be a *flexible* characterization of a group of subjects. It “is relevantly like me” actually picks out the property of being relevantly the way I am *actually*. But I could be otherwise, and in particular my disposition to value particular things could be very different from what it actually is. But then, with respect to those worlds in which I am suitably different, “is relevantly like me” signifies the property of being relevantly the way I *would be* in those situations. (“We, as we actually are,” is the rigidification of “we,” as understood here, and hence a *rigid* specification.)

Dispositionalism about values, of the considered sort, cannot account for the truth of (I). The reason is straightforward: provided that dispositions to value particular things are obviously contingent, the view does entail that the following *flexible* biconditional is (if true) *merely contingent*:

(L) x is good iff we are disposed to value x under appropriately reflective conditions.

But any counterexample to the necessity of (L) is such that the embedded conditional in (I) is false with respect to it. Hence the embedded conditional (I) is *not* necessary, and hence (I) is false.

The argument generalizes easily with respect to any dispositional account of values, as it only depends on the tension between the contingency of the relevant dispositions to elicit the “evaluative” responses vs. the necessity of the practicality requirement. (See Holland (2001) for further discussion.)

This consideration, even if sound, quite obviously, fails to *refute* dispositional accounts (or evaluative realism in general).⁶ Evaluative *objectivists*, claiming that evaluative properties fully objective and not response-dependent, typically argue explicitly against anything along the lines of (I) and go externalist about values, by holding something like:

(E) It is contingent and *a priori* that: If something is good, then we would desire it (under appropriate reflective conditions, weakness of will and the like aside).

Or, equivalently,

(I@) It is necessary and *a priori* that: If something is good, then we, *as we actually are*, would desire it (under appropriate reflective conditions, weakness of will and the like aside).

Here is what David Brink says:

[T]he internalist cannot rest content with the extensional claim that everyone is in fact motivated [by what is morally good]. Any externalist could claim that. The internalist about motives claims that it is true in virtue of the concept of morality that [moral goodness] necessarily motivates. According to the internalist, then, it must be conceptually impossible for someone to [know that something is morally good] and remain unmoved [Brink (1986), pp. 29-30].⁷

That requires, of course, rejecting Mackie's point at the beginning of this section concerning values being practical. It is not part of my aim to argue against externalism here: it suffices to observe that according to the present interpretation of McDowell's response, although values certainly are real though in some sense subjective properties, Mackie's argument is still in force. Shifting to a secondary-quality analogy, as understood now, does *not* render irrelevant worries about how values stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibilities.

IV. THE FLEXIBLE CASE: EVALUATIVE REALISM VS. EVALUATIVE RELATIVISM

Flexibilism about values, by contrast, straightforwardly accounts for the truth of internalist claims of the (I) sort. With respect to the particular Lewisian proposal, flexibilism would hold that the following holds *a priori* and in virtue of the nature of goodness:

(L) x is good iff we are disposed to value x under appropriately reflective conditions.

As Lewis himself states, something like (I) is indeed a consequence of the proposal:

If something is a value, and if someone is of the appropriate "we", and if he is in ideal conditions, then it follows that he will value it. And if he values it, and if he desires as he desires to desire, then he will desire it [Lewis (1989), p. 72].

The problem now is that flexibilism has relativistic consequences and hence falls short of constituting a *realist* position about values.

The main idea behind relativism, I take it, is that there are “essentially contestable” claims, in the domain in question. Following Crispin Wright (1992), one might say that relativism has it that it is conceivable that there are (irremovable) *faultless* divergences, in the domain, not constituted by anyone’s being in the error in judging something false.

With a little more detail: let us say that two subjects *diverge* in their judgments with respect to a given sentence-type iff they master it, one of them has a judgment she could express, in an ordinary situation, by uttering a token of that sentence with its conventional meaning, whereas the other has a judgment she could express, in an ordinary situation, by uttering a token of the negation of that sentence with its conventional meaning. So assume that I’m tired but you’re not: we both diverge in our judgments concerning “I’m tired” in the intended sense. Let us focus on the particular case of *simple* sentences: predications of a given predicate, i.e., the completion of the predicate by a singular term (or a singular definite description).⁸ Let us say that this divergence in judgments with respect to a simple predication of a given predicate is *irremovable* iff it is not explainable in terms of (i) the context-dependence of the singular term (or description) expression-type; (ii) vagueness or other kinds of indeterminacies; or (iii) facts independent of the subjects in question. To illustrate: our previous divergence in our judgments concerning “I’m tired” is excluded by (i); our possible divergence in our judgments concerning “Fifi is pink”, provided Fifi is a borderline case of pinkness, is excluded by (ii); and a divergence in judgments with “water covers more than half the Earth’s surface” between me and my counterfactual self in a situation in which the Earth is almost dry is excluded by (iii). Finally, let us say that one such (irremovable) divergence is *faultless* if no-one is being thereby in error of judging something false.

I propose to characterize relativism with respect to a given domain thus:

- (R) Relativism concerning a predicate holds iff it is conceivable that two subjects irremovably faultlessly diverge in their judgments concerning a simple predication of the predicate.

As suggested, I think that (R) captures well enough the intuition the traditional antirealist tries to exploit, according to which certain claims in a discourse are *essentially contestable*.

(Relativism so characterized consists in there being *conceivable* irremovable divergences. This does not *entail* that those divergences actually occur. But it does not *preclude* it either. *Factual* relativism concerning a given predicate can be seen as the claim that the sort of irremovable divergences whose conceivability establishes relativism concerning it *actually occur*.)

Now flexible response-dependence *does* entail relativism, so conceived, and hence, in particular, that values are flexible response-dependent properties vindicates evaluative relativism. The argument for the claim that if a predicate signifies a flexible response-dependent property, then relativism concerning it, in the sense of (R), follows, is indeed quite direct: any target situation whose proper intuitive description favors the flexible response-dependence of its signification contains the materials for a suitably irremovable divergence.⁹

In sum, the second interpretation of McDowell's response can be claimed to satisfactorily respond to Mackie's argument from queerness, but it does entail a form of relativism about values. One might think that this *is* indeed the right interpretation. After all, in the discussed paper McDowell does say: "I can see no reason why we should not regard the contentiousness [of values] as ineliminable" [McDowell (1985), p. 145, fn. 46].

What about his explicit statements concerning the *reality* and *genuineness* of values? They would certainly be jeopardized, provided that *realism* is understood in a sufficiently exigent sense so as to be incompatible with relativism (and hence flexibility) — although not requiring full objectivity (and hence counting dispositions to elicit mental responses as real). This is indeed, I think, a sensible sense, and it is the one I have taken for granted in this paper. But, sensible or not, it is certainly not the only conceivable sense. My guess is that McDowell might require less than this for *reality*, so that values qualify as *genuine* features in virtue of the relevant evaluative predications being truth-apt (against non-cognitivism), and some of them being true (against error-theorism)¹⁰ — and knowably so (against skepticism).

This last remaining question seems to me to be merely about words and, in a way, temperament.

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NOTES

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¹ And, more recently, also Mark Johnston (2004).

² I am assuming, in common with Kripke (1980), and many others in discussions on philosophy of mind, philosophy of science or metaethics, that the notion of rigidity might be extended to be applicable to predicates, roughly along the lines of: a predicate is rigid iff it signifies the same property in all relevant worlds. Proposals like this have recently received criticisms, among which: that it would trivialize, making *all* predicates trivially rigid, and that in any case it would over-generalize, counting as rigid some predicates that do not signify natural properties/kinds. I try to respond to these criticisms, respectively, in my unpublished “Rigidity for Predicates and the Trivialization Problem” and “Predicates Rigidly Signifying the ‘Unnatural.’” In the latter I also argue that the relevant simple predicates like those that will concern us here, “is red,” “is funny,” “is good” and the like are, nonetheless, rigid. Given this I will speak of them *signifying properties*, without relativizing such talk to worlds.

³ See previous footnote.

⁴ This section contains numerous (here pertinent) simplifying assumptions, the removal of which requires substantial elaboration. This is done in the first part of López de Sa (2003).

⁵ For details, see Lewis (1989) and López de Sa (2003). My view is that Lewis himself, however, would probably favor — as I would also do — the *flexibilist* position to be considered in the next section.

⁶ In my own view, it does crucially contribute to the case against realism about values, when placed in an appropriate and broader context. I hope to elaborate on this elsewhere.

⁷ In the original passage, instead of the inserted claims about moral *values* Brink makes claims about moral *considerations* and judgments, but I take it that he would certainly concur with what I say about properties and facts.

⁸ The reason for so doing is the following: a relativism that could be attacked merely by pointing to (the obviously not “essentially contestable”) cases of “if that is good then it is good” is not worth considering. Silly as the observation may be, I think drawing attention to it serves to dissolve most of the usual claims which have it that relativism is, somehow, “self-refuting.” statements of the semantic features of the relevant predicates, which eventually entail that all simple predications are “essentially contestable,” need not be themselves “essentially contestable.”

⁹ For further details see again López de Sa (2003). An evaluative relativism of this sort, it is often said, contradicts a basic platitude regarding conversations concerning the evaluative: ordinary participants are committed to regard utterances of “that is good” and “that is not good” as (literally) contradicting each other. Here is what Wright says:

“If [Indexical Relativism] were right, there would be an analogy between disputes of inclinations and the ‘dispute’ between one who says ‘I am tired’ and her companion who replies, ‘Well, I am not’ (when what is at issue is one more museum visit). There are the materials here, perhaps, for a (further) disagreement but no disagreement has yet been expressed. But ordinary understanding already hears a disagreement between one who asserts that hurt-free infidelity is acceptable and one who asserts that it is not” [Wright (2001), p. 51]. I think that there are versions of evaluative (indexical) relativism, like the one entailed by the Lewisian version of flexibilism about values, that can indeed be shown *not* to contradict the alluded platitude. I offer the argument in my unpublished “(Indexical) Relativism about Values: A Presuppositional Defense.”

¹⁰ It is in this less exigent sense that Lewis himself also thinks his position could be described as realist: values, as the flexible proposal conceives them, “do exist” [Lewis (1989), p. 93].

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